



Inaugural Speech

President Shirley Strum Kenny
April 28, 1995

Thank you so much. I accept this medallion and the concomitant responsibilities with the utmost gravity--and joy.

A personal note. It is great to be here with so many friends, old and new. I want to thank all those people who came here from other places and times in my life. Your being here means the world to me. My only regret is that my parents, Marcus and Florence Strum, could not be here--they would have loved it.

A foundation head once told me--I think it was a compliment--that I was the most improbable college president he had ever met. Surely I am the most improbable Stony Brook president. Not only am I the first non-physicist, I am also the first who is not named John.

This inauguration is certainly unusual in the annals of academic ceremony. The budget crisis made me think long and hard about whether we should have it at all, but I finally decided it was important to affirm the future of Stony Brook now. So I decided to have a "no frills" event. Then something wonderful happened. The newly formed steering committee didn't turn a hair when the answer to "How big is the budget?" was "What budget?" They just began to work. Catching the enthusiasm of the committee, the community said, "This is important," and they pitched in to make today possible. If you look at your program, p. 13, you will see how many businesses signed on to support the event. As a result, this week of celebration will not cost any State funds. Faculty and students planned symposia, campus-wide events, and a night of fireworks and dancing. High school musicians joined us today. What started as a subdued event has turned into a celebration of our very special community, on campus and on Long Island. It has been a magical week.

I knew a lot about Stony Brook before I came here. I had worked with John Toll at the University of Maryland. (As Chair of the Faculty Senate, I spoke at his inauguration and first met Frank Yang there.) I knew his style, his energy, his determination, his vision for Stony Brook. There is no better model of how to do good and important things fast. I had worked with and admired Jack Marburger; in fact, we had started collaborative ventures. My feelings of regret at his decision to leave the presidency were intense; it meant a loss to Stony Brook, and--so I thought then--the loss of the best of colleagues. Little did I imagine, that we would remain colleagues and that I would be standing here today.

Thanks to the foresight of Governor Rockefeller, who believed in a great State University, and to my predecessor presidents and all the faculty who took the risk to come to this fledgling institution, Stony Brook has traveled farther faster than any other university I can name. An extraordinary journey, a great adventure has unfolded in these few years--a mere 38 years, a blink in the eye for Harvard, not to mention Oxford or Bologna. Unlike other SUNY institutions, Stony Brook was not an existing college brought into the system from a previous life; it was built from scratch,

with no recognition of the seeming impossibility of the task, the odds of growing a truly great university in the mud fields of a raw new campus, no hesitation in metamorphosing what was first intended to be a small college into a world-class research university.

That is what I love about Stony Brook. I love the boldness of its ambitions, the blindness to obstacles, the recklessness of ignoring "why we can't" for "let's do it," the spirit of adventure. I love the fact that we are still an adolescent university; we are not finished yet; we are still open to change. I love the fact that we have reached national and international eminence, we have our Nobel Prize winner, our Fields Prize Winner, our Bower Prize winner, our four MacArthur Fellows, eleven fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, fourteen members of the National Academy of Sciences, member of the National Academy of Engineering, and eleven members of the Royal Society and other national academies of foreign countries. We have all the proofs we need that we've achieved the highest levels in research, but the realization has not made us complacent. Stony Brook is, as it has always been, a work in progress.

The combination of flexibility and lack of complacency will be more important than ever in the years ahead because if we are to continue our meteoric rise to the top, we are going to have to be able to adapt to a new era of higher education that is very different from the 1960's and 1970's, the formative years not only for Stony Brook but for American research universities in general. Our landscape has turned far harsher now; our funding streams threaten to dry up. The concept of the great state university as an economic resource is not widely recognized in our State. Too many New Yorkers do not seem to understand that creating a great State university is a sound investment both in educating tomorrow's leaders and in nurturing and supporting business and industry. Our first educational task is to make our publics understand that basic truth.

How will the university of the future differ from the past? First of all, the expansive mode of our past is now clearly over, as we certainly know in the State of New York, and with it has gone our sense of the trust and admiration of a grateful public. As business is "re-engineering," to use a now well-worn phrase, we are expected to re-engineer, and we must. For more than a decade universities have been bemoaning the fact that the outside world does not understand our financial needs or the high cost of first-class education and research. Now we need to accept the fact that our publics don't understand, and that the failure in communication lies with us--although we have a compelling case, we have not yet convinced those who pay the bills. Nor, I have to admit, have we seriously examined how to do what we do both better and cheaper by developing new educational and administrative processes. Universities have recently absorbed huge cuts, but we have done so primarily by simple subtraction from what they had, rather than reconceiving the way we do our work and then trying, hard as it may be, to create new and more efficient methods to do it. So we are faced with two immediate issues: first, to communicate better the essential nature of what we do, and second, to learn how to maintain and increase our excellence by new, more efficient modes of operation.

We will have to reconceptualize the research university to prosper in our time. The University of the twenty-first century will create new relationships and symbioses

between research and teaching agendas, and will develop new and less costly delivery systems for learning. To be leaders, we must make all our decisions with a clear vision of how higher education will evolve in the next decade and a willingness to embrace the change and shape it. We cannot afford to cling fiercely but hopelessly to a past that is over.

It is my goal that Stony Brook will not merely adapt to an increasingly hostile environment but will take the lead in creating the American research university of the twenty-first century. That goal may sound ambitious, perhaps not pessimistic enough, but it is totally in keeping with the optimistic aspirations that have brought us this far.

I see so much that is innovative already happening at Stony Brook, tucked into the corners of buildings and not yet articulated for the campus as a whole. I see teachers inventing dazzling new ways to teach. I see the research, graduate, and undergraduate missions of the campus melding in funded research projects staffed by research professors, graduate students and undergraduates together and mutually dependent for success. I see research completed in our laboratories moving to the commercial enterprises that should refuel Long Island's economy, and I see our students interned and our graduates hired by the same companies. Our Health Sciences Center simultaneously performs cutting-edge research and provides state-of-the-art health care to the people of Long Island. The concept of translational research brings advances in the biomedical sciences to the bedside. I am struck that although we have not changed our rhetoric about the University, we are constantly re-inventing the actual University experience.

Perhaps it is time now to change that rhetoric--and our habits. We need to admit that in this new era things will be different and that our responsibility is to make them better at the same time. Perhaps the ways we've done things for the last twenty or thirty years are outdated in a world being reshaped by new forces day by day. As much as we mourn the past, we'd better focus our energies on the future.

There is no question that budgetary deprivation dominated my thinking as I worked on this speech. Samuel Johnson was certainly right when he said, nothing concentrates the mind like the prospect of hanging. During this year's State budget cycle, I have gone through denial and anger and grief for higher education as I have known and practiced it. I have worked and will continue to work with all my energy for supportive State funding and against shifting the financial burden to students. I am sure that the fiscal bad times won't last forever, but we can't just sit and wait for them to change. I am ready to start rethinking how we reach our aspirations; I am not ready to say that because the State is cutting our budget, we can only be second-class. I am not willing to be second-class. Knowing that the odds are against us, knowing that we will have to reconceptualize how we operate, I am ready to roll up my sleeves and begin. And I call on you today to join me.

In order to have a hope of success, all of us will have to realize that we are part of a single campus and the greater good of the University means the greater good of all its parts. Although the parts of Stony Brook are extraordinary, we have not yet realized the whole. Stony Brook is many principalities, but its strength can grow only if it becomes one integrated institution. We have great departments and programs,

but we must continue to work together for a central identity, shared pride, and a sense of community. Building an intellectual and experiential identity is at the top of the list of essential intangibles.

One of my major themes today is, in E. M. Forrester's words, "Only connect." Only connect the arts and the sciences, the teachers and the students, the university and the community, the research and the applications, the work and the pleasure, the individual ambition and the University's aspirations. Intellectually, only connect curiosity with imagination, the curiosity to understand how the world works and the imagination to make it work better.

"Only connect the prose and the passion," Forster wrote in *Howards End*, and today I want to do just that--to offer you not only my passion for where we should go in the years ahead but the prose of how to get there. As obvious as our direction must be, unless we have a plan and concrete goals, it will be all too easy to fail.

That is why when I arrived last fall I began a campus-wide five-year planning process. I believed that it was essential for this institution of many strong departments to have a shared vision of where we should be five years hence, what our priorities are, and how we should get there. The nine task forces of faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community people who tackled this enormous task are completing their reports. Next fall we will refine and adopt the Plan. Implementation will give us direction and define our budget goals so that we do not drift or founder in these tough times.

Now, having completed eight months on campus, I find my sense of the future very much in touch with what I have learned from the Task Forces. I share their optimism; they share my sense of the importance of community and communication. And so, even before the final Plan is completed, I feel comfortable today in committing to my own personal goals for the year, let's say, 2002. Seven years is not a long span for universities to make fundamental change, but this is no time for the timid. Only by daring, ingenuity, and the willingness to take risks for great rewards will we in fact realize our remarkable potential. So let me share with you my vision, ambitious but I think not rash, tempered by the prudence that comes from knowing that I have to deliver what I commit to today.

By the year 2002:

1. Stony Brook will have doubled the number of programs nationally ranked in the top 20 and in the top 30. Each year, including this one, some Stony Brook departments reappear in national listings; others are coming onto the list. By maintaining the quality of ranked departments, strengthening departments approaching national recognition, and developing strong interdisciplinary research clusters, we can make that goal.
2. We will broaden our spectrum of excellence. Ironically, our best recognized strengths are primarily in the most expensive disciplines. It makes little sense to neglect areas in which relatively small investments in superb faculty can rapidly improve our profile.

3. The Health Sciences Center will both build its research programs and continue to improve the quality of medical care for more the 1.3 million people of Suffolk County. As new as the Health Sciences Center is, its quality is already noteworthy. We are particularly fortunate to have strong linkages between the Life Sciences and medical research programs that position us to make dramatic strides in multidisciplinary research in the years ahead. By collaborating increasingly with other departments for research and with Long Island hospitals for full and fine health care of the Long Island population, the Health Sciences Center will reach its full potential.

4. We will become the national model for undergraduate education at research universities. Some people still believe that you can improve teaching only at the expense of research; that's nonsense. Only if research and learning interact closely, are we doing it right. That is why I established the National Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University and invited faculty and presidents from the leading institutions in the country to participate in this exploration of the future--we must find a model that joins the two missions and strengthens both.

After the National Commission makes its report, we will, through campus processes, develop a curricular model that truly meets the challenges of the future by creating a symbiotic relationship between the research, graduate, and undergraduate missions to provide a new kind of undergraduate experience available only at research institutions. We will find new ways to integrate the undergraduate experience with the research mission without compromising the research mission and without short-changing the undergraduate experience. Collaborative learning will increasingly develop as the method of choice. We will master pedagogical technology, so that we neither use computers as drone machines nor blindly allow the capabilities and capacities of the technology to shape our courses. We will recognize that just as research is becoming more interdisciplinary, so is learning, and we must have the flexibility to imbue our curriculum with the interdisciplinarity that will be the hallmark of the next century.

As we improve teaching and learning, we also have to work closely with the schools, understanding that education must be a seamless fabric from pre-school to graduate school, that none of the parts are more important than the others, and that none of the parts can work right unless all of them work closely together; we are inextricably linked.

5. We will create a supportive environment for both graduate and undergraduate students. Undergraduates will benefit from significant upgrading of our advising and career services. We will continue to renovate dorms. We will improve transportation services. We will make registering and paying for classes user friendly and will improve technology for student services. Our goal will be to serve each student's unique needs.

For graduate students, we will make fellowships a central fundraising goal so that we can attract the best of the best to Stony Brook. We must prepare them to teach as well as to perform research. Then we must give increasing emphasis to helping them move from degree to career. A graduate student is, as most of us know, a lifelong responsibility. Just as our professors guided us through many career changes, we will continue to serve our students long after they leave Stony Brook.

6. We will increase sponsored research by 60 per cent. This does not seem an extravagant promise because, in fact, over the last seven years we have increased funded research by 55 per cent. By the quality of new appointments and the retention of our best research faculty, I expect us easily to overmatch this goal even in times when we have begun to worry about national research support--and probably sooner than 2002.

7. We will at least double annual external fund raising. Actually, I believe we can triple it. Through the Stony Brook Foundation, we are now initiating a campaign for graduate and undergraduate scholarship support, which will increase the funding of scholarships tenfold by 2002. The necessity to multiply scholarship funds rapidly comes with the expected major increases in tuition and decrease in State tuition assistance for needy students. No deserving student will be deprived of a Stony Brook education for lack of funds.

We will also initiate within the next three or four years our first capital campaign to raise money for facilities, equipment, and endowed chairs, scholarships, and programs.

8. We will decrease the cost of administration by 20 per cent and, at the same time, improve the services. Part of this will happen through re-engineering our administrative processes. Part will happen through technology. Most of all, we will depend on the people who work here to come up with ideas to save money. Insofar as budgets allow, we will downsize the administration through attrition and retirement.

9. We can no longer patch together our computer systems. Within the next four years, our computer systems must be reconceived to meet our current needs, and we must invest in the appropriate equipment and software to make our operations efficient.

10. Maintenance and improvement of facilities are a top priority, even in a time of shrinking resources. Deferred maintenance has taken a terrible toll on our buildings; we cannot allow any more decline. We can not learn, teach, or do research in sub-standard spaces. Facilities strongly affect the academic processes; our workplaces should convey the conviction that what we do here is important. Improvement of our dormitories, classrooms, laboratories, and outdoor spaces will be a major priority despite the budget.

11. We will become a community of scholars in which every person is judged by his or her own strengths. Faculty, staff, students, administrators--all will be valued for the quality of their minds, the commitment to our goals, their achievements, and their helpfulness to others. It will be a diverse community as our world is a diverse world. Since our graduates will function in a global culture, we can only serve them well if we prepare them to work and think in a global context, and we can only do that if our faculty, staff, and administration reflect the diversity of our student population and our world. We will make significant headway every year to correct the deficit of minorities and women in the upper ranks of the faculty and administration by hiring top-quality people and then retaining and promoting them. We will choose the best

candidates for every position realizing that diversity is a prime need, that diversity at institutions of learning is not a luxury; it is a necessity for intellectual excellence.

12. We will become more involved than ever in the wider community, both residential and corporate. All our efforts must be undertaken with the understanding that we have an awesome responsibility to our community and our nation--that the quality of life issues, medical, commercial, ecological, technological, intellectual, aesthetic, moral and ethical depend on what happens here, and that we must connect closely with our community to make life here better. We can, we must be the engine for a revitalized Long Island economy.

13. And then we will let the world know that Stony Brook has continued its meteoric rise in the ranks of American institutions. When people talk about excellence and innovation, they will talk about Stony Brook. When they rank the best institutions, Stony Brook will be on their tongues. The promise of its early life will come to fruition in the recognition of its present. Stony Brook will not only be top tier, it will be widely recognized as top tier.

I feel a great urgency to achieve this agenda. This may not be the best of times, but it is our time, and this is our place. If we are to fulfill our potential, we cannot do it contingent on optimum conditions. We have to move now; we cannot wait for a more prosperous era or a more hospitable climate for education. This is the time we have.

Our definition of success cannot be exactly as it was first envisioned because times have changed. Research is no longer the only measure that counts. The public demands more than that, the melding of nationally recognized research with excellence in graduate and particularly undergraduate education. That is the prose. But let us not neglect the passion. A great university is more than funding formulas and maintenance schedules, although it cannot function without them. Education needs things--books, computers, laboratories, studios, classrooms. But money alone cannot make it great. It takes more.

Curiosity and imagination--the driving forces for learning, and the cornerstone on which universities are built. A yearning for knowledge and a sense of wonder. A Stony Brook education should engender in our students that spirit of adventure that has defined our history.

And we should be guided by that youthful spirit of adventure. This is no time for us to grow old and inflexible, no time to lose heart or our willingness to take risks, to stop ignoring the "why we can't" for "let's just do it." If the challenges have never been greater, the stakes have never been so high.

The students labeled this week's events, "The Spirit of a New Beginning." I fervently hope it is. I want for us a future shaped by the attitude of winners, the sense of youth and energy to forge ahead whatever the odds, the sturdiness to reach our goals. And then I wish us the sense of community, the caring, the commitment to make Stony Brook truly a living, learning community on a very large scale.

I pledge to you a journey worth the taking. There will be hard work, frustration and aggravations, and triumphs ahead. It will not be easy, but I guarantee you it will be

fun, and it will certainly be worthwhile. It will make Stony Brook a leader among institutions; it will give us the opportunity profoundly to affect American higher education in general and our students' lives in particular.

So today is our day, a celebration of a glorious past and a commitment to an even more glorious future. Today is the time to be grateful for that past even as we open ourselves to a future that may seem uncertain and unpredictable, but that can be ours if we are smart enough to take it on its own terms and energetic enough to make it work on our terms. Today is the time to remember that Stony Brook is still young and flexible and open to change. It's time to forgo regret for what was and begin to shape what will be, accepting that we've got to work in new ways, recognizing that the world is different and we must change, and understanding that we have to take control and master that change.

I am ready. Together let's make that future ours.

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